

Congress is turning its back on the public school.

They know that a cut is a cut, and that a block grant leads to a cut. They know that nearly the entire discussion this year on education from the other side of the aisle—and a time or two on this side of the aisle—amounts to the empty words of a snake-oil salesman.

Well, now we have a chance to turn this all around, like the public has forced the Congress to do in years past. Congress cuts the funding for schools, the public groans in disbelief, and the Congress wises up. Let us not wait until September to do it. The House has a chance this week to put back the money they've taken. The Senate will have its chance soon.

In America, you turn your back on the public school at your peril. What we need to do instead is meet the hard challenges head on.

The schools, in the inner cities, and in the rural areas, are crumbling. The Congress can do something about it.

The classes are overcrowded, which adds to the school construction problem. The Congress can take action.

The budgets have been cut and cut, and failing a local levy can mean disaster for a school. The Congress can keep its hands off the school budget, and restore these House cuts.

The Congress can increase national expenditures to more than the meager 2 percent of the national budget it now sets aside for schools. And the Congress can set the right tone.

Rather than generating empty air that has the effect of chipping away at support for the local public school—the very foundation of democracy, citizenship, and community in this nation—the Congress can speak the words that need to be said.

The responsibility of serving as a member of Congress, as a member of the United States Senate, is weighty indeed. By our words, our signature, and our actions, we can take steps to improve our nation's schools and our student's futures.

We can set an important tone, and say the hard things that the students, families, teachers, school officials, community leaders and others need to hear. We can also talk of success.

But if we act and speak only to tear the fabric of support for the public school—if the tone we set is only to chip, chip, chip at public confidence in an institution they know personally to have value—then we are abdicating part of our great responsibility as Senators.

Americans know that members of Congress can work together, and achieve results. They know we could take actions to improve their public schools. And that is why it is so disheartening to me when Republicans or Democrats put ideology or politics or mean-spiritedness in the way of success for our students. We must act together to do what is in the best interest of all children.

It is also important Mr. President that we conduct background checks

and adequately screen our teachers to make sure they are qualified, competent and capable of providing our children with the quality education they deserve.

THE CRIME IDENTIFICATION TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I wish to speak for a moment as a cosponsor of the Crime Identification Technology Act of 1998. Mr. President, this is a bill that simply, but importantly, provides funding to states and local communities so they can conduct quality criminal background checks. This bill assures parents that dangerous adults will not be employed by their child's school or child care facility.

There is no doubt that most children today head off to school or are dropped off at child care and are supervised by competent, qualified, caring adults. But as our society becomes increasingly violent, parents need the assurance that when their child is under another adult's care, steps have been taken to assure that the care-giver is qualified and competent and safe to take care of their child.

Mr. President, we sit in outrage when television newscasters report yet another story of a child who has been abused or molested when parents thought they had found a safe place to take their child. Nothing frightens a parent more than a report of a child who has been abused by a predator—molesters, abusers or pedophiles.

We do not have to sit and wait, Mr. President. We can and must do more. We have the laws to better screen those who care for our children. Let us use them. We must protect our children and see to it that they grow up in a safe environment. No child should ever suffer these kinds of traumas. That is why Mr. President, I am cosponsoring the Crime Identification Technology Act of 1998. I believe this bill is a strong step to accomplish the type of protection that is needed.

We have a right to expect that those people to whom we entrust the care of our children are decent, upright, trustworthy individuals. Parents have a right to know that anyone who comes in contact with their children in an unsupervised environment has been appropriately screened. We have a right to know that anyone with a criminal history of child abuse, molestation and sexual crimes against children will be prevented from being in a position where they have access to our children.

In this highly mobile society we live in, we know that abusers move easily across state boundaries seeking jobs in places where they think their past will not catch up to them. If schools or child care providers only check in-state applicants for state criminal convictions—and do not require a fingerprint check which can be scanned against a national clearinghouse of convicted criminals—they have not adequately screened applicants before hiring them to oversee our children.

In fact, Mr. President, a case that prompted the passage of laws requiring national criminal background checks in my home State of Washington, involved the arrest of a social worker who possessed hundreds of photos and videotapes of young boys engaged in sexual activities. He was charged on 40 counts of possession of child pornography.

The investigation began after one of the adolescents under his supervision accused him of sexual abuse. When the social worker was hired, a background check of this man was "clean" and reported "no past problems." However, he was previously employed by a state agency far away, across state lines in Texas. Although the Washington state agency checked his references in Texas, they did not check to see if he had a criminal history in any other state.

The background check did not extend beyond the borders of Washington state. State officials at the time admitted they had no routine way of determining whether any state worker had ever run afoul of the law outside Washington's borders.

As a result of this incident, the Washington State Legislature closed this loophole by passing laws requiring national criminal background checks on workers and volunteers who deal with vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly and disabled.

More recently, at a Washington, D.C. day care center, a substitute security guard was filling in for the regular guard, who was sick that day. That afternoon, the substitute guard was arrested on the premises—allegedly an accessory to murder a few months earlier.

In this case, the security firm failed to screen the worker adequately. He was a resident of Maryland and the firm only checked state records which revealed no criminal record. However, the substitute guard had a long rap sheet in Washington D.C., which the security firm did not check. The failure of this security firm to conduct a background check of the neighboring state's jurisdiction put 70 children at tremendous risk.

It is imperative that we stop interstate movement and let abusers know that their backgrounds will be checked, their applications will be screened and national and state fingerprint checks will be conducted where appropriate. In addition, it is essential that we provide funds to the states so they can update their criminal history records and provide timely information when it is requested.

Unfortunately, Mr. President, we live in a time that requires us to protect our children by screening and checking the backgrounds of volunteers and other people who have access to our children. Statistics reveal that 46 percent of child molesters are non-family members who are known to their victims. These are "trusted" adults, such as teachers, scoutmasters, coaches,

clergy, counselors and neighbors. As parents, we must be concerned about the people who have access to our children. The bottom line is that strict screening mechanisms and criminal background checks are vital to the safety of our children.

Mr. President, I am cosponsoring this bill because it provides grants to the States for programs for fingerprint-supported background checks for non-criminal justice purposes. These purposes include screening youth service employees, volunteers, and other individuals in positions of trust—if authorized by federal or state law and administered by a government agency. This bill also promotes enhanced communication nationwide between local, state, and national computer systems for domestic violence and sexual offender identification and registration systems.

The Crime Identification Technology Act of 1998 is also important because it provides necessary funding to the States so they can upgrade their criminal history record systems and improve criminal identification of sexual offenders.

Mr. President, this bill is an effective way to stop pedophiles from stalking our children under the guise of employment or volunteer activity. It will also help States protect their children by letting sexual predators know that background checks and screening mechanisms will be conducted wherever they move.

It is imperative that would-be employees not be able to avoid detection during background checks by failing to report their criminal past. The Raleigh News and Observer reported on January 8, 1997 that Terry Dondrell Howie pled guilty to being an accessory to a murder, at the same time he worked taking care of toddlers at a local day care center.

Howie was fired from his job at the day care center, three days after he was sentenced to five years in prison for his role in a deadly car-jacking. Although a state law that requires annual background checks would have eventually caught his felony charges, day care employees facing felony charges can escape detection for months.

There is no requirement that a lengthy background check be completed before a hiring because of the high turnover on day care center staffs.

This can be a fatal practice that must be changed. Take the tragic case of 18-year-old Michelle Montoya, who—in 1997, as a senior in Rio Linda High School—was brutally raped and killed in the school's wood shop by a substitute janitor with a felonious past. The janitor was put on-the-job before fingerprint tests were completed. He had served time for voluntary manslaughter and just prior to the murder of Michelle, he had been paroled. Although California has since passed legislation prohibiting school districts from hiring employees before back-

ground checks are complete, the same is not true in every state.

As parents we expect our schools and day care centers to protect our children. We must provide the funding and the attention necessary to correct this problem so that other families do not suffer the same kind of horrible tragedy and loss as the Montoya family.

Mr. President, we cannot take any chances when it comes to protecting our children. We must do everything we can to ensure their safety and protection which is why I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this bill.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWNBACK). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO MRS. CATHY ABELL

Mr. LOTT. Mister President, I would like to recognize the professional dedication, vision and public service of Mrs. Cathy Abell who is leaving the Army Senate Legislative Liaison Office to serve as the Congressional Affairs Coordinator for the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. It is a privilege for me to recognize the many outstanding achievements she has provided for the Senate, the Army, and our great Nation.

Cathy Abell worked for every Member of the Senate as the Secretary of the Army's legislative liaison to the Senate. She was instrumental in facilitating the exchange of information between our constituent services offices and the Department of the Army. Mrs. Abell is an expert at cutting through the red tape of the military bureaucracy and never lost sight of the fact that taking care of the individual was paramount. I never knew of an instance in which Mrs. Abell would back away from doing the right thing for the Army, the soldier or family member and the Senate offices she served.

Mrs. Abell earned the reputation as someone on whom we could rely on to respond to our inquiries in a responsive, professional manner. She always provided informative, well researched responses to our constituents. Cathy Abell was the "go to" person in the Army's Senate Legislative Liaison Office. When a Senate office had a really complex case, the legislative assistants knew that they should direct the inquiry to her. Mrs. Abell would skillfully work through the complex military regulations and determine how best to maintain the integrity of the Army's processes while permitting the soldier or family member to receive the relief required by their situation.

She is able to communicate effectively with both military officials and Congressional staff members and has developed superb working relationships with our staffs. Her professional abilities and the excellent working relationships earned her the respect and trust which served her, the Army and the Senate so well.

Mrs. Abell recognized that many of our staff were not familiar with Army organizations, processes and procedures. To address this lack of familiarity, she organized and implemented a series of trips in which our staffs were able to experience first hand the conditions under which military personnel are recruited, processed and trained. As a result of her initiative, Senate staff members are able to more accurately explain Army procedures to constituents, in many cases eliminating the need for a formal inquiry. Initiative, caring service and professionalism are the terms used to describe Mrs. Abell.

Mister President, Cathy Abell is a great credit to the Army and the Nation. As she now departs to share her experience and expertise with the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, I call upon my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to recognize her service to the Senate and wish her well in her new assignment.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business Friday, July 10, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,525,566,285,491.56 (Five trillion, five hundred twenty-five billion, five hundred sixty-six million, two hundred eighty-five thousand, four hundred ninety-one dollars and fifty-six cents).

One year ago, July 10, 1997, the federal debt stood at \$5,354,746,000,000 (Five trillion, three hundred fifty-four billion, seven hundred forty-six million).

Twenty-five years ago, July 10, 1973, the federal debt stood at \$454,595,000,000 (Four hundred fifty-four billion, five hundred ninety-five million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$5 trillion—\$5,070,971,285,491.56 (Five trillion, seventy billion, nine hundred seventy-one million, two hundred eighty-five thousand, four hundred ninety-one dollars and fifty-six cents) during the past 25 years.

HIGHER EDUCATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I would like to discuss an important issue that should be addressed by House and Senate conferees meeting to resolve differences regarding the Higher Education Reauthorization Act.

Various institutions of higher education have tried for a number of years to have the Age Discrimination in Employment Act amended to allow certain types of early retirement plans for tenured faculty. Various Members of